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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: MALAWI - REFUGEE CAMP CONSOLIDATION FAILS TO STOP  
INFLUX, BUT UNITES DISCONTENT

**¶11. (SBU) SUMMARY:** The government of Malawi's (GOM) closure of the Luwani refugee camp and Karonga transit shelter has failed to stop the flow of Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Somali men through the country. Over 400 of these refugees arrived in a single day in October. Asylum seekers from the Horn of Africa continue to use the Dzaleka refugee camp as a rest stop before disappearing, paying up to USD 200 per person to be transported to Mozambique and beyond. At the same time, land and shelter problems have delayed the relocation of the remaining 760 refugees from the Luwani camp and the increased population in Dzaleka is both stressing camp resources and raising concern among locals who increasingly view refugees as economic competitors. As the GOM continues to seek a way to stop what it views as illegal migration through its territory, delays in the processing and settlement of legitimate refugees, an increased push to repatriate existing refugees, and new refugee legislation are likely.

#### Security Concerns Cause Consolidation of the Refugee Camps

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**¶12. (SBU)** In May 2007, the government of Malawi announced the closure of the Luwani refugee camp in the southern part of the country, as well as the Karonga Transit Shelter near the northern border with Tanzania. At the time, the GOM stated that security risks were the primary reason for the closure and cited instances of large groups of Ethiopians, Eritreans, and Somalis intercepted crossing into Mozambique and Zambia. By closing the shelter and the camp, the GOM hoped to stem the flow of migration from the Horn of Africa through Malawi.

The asylum seekers from the Horn are almost exclusively male, aged between 18 and 35, and claim they are fleeing forced conscription. The GOM feels the men are usually economic migrants who took advantage of the shelter and the camps to receive free supplies, food, and transportation from the northern border of Malawi to a point close to Mozambique, where they can continue on to South Africa.

#### Still Arriving From the Horn

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**¶13. (SBU)** The closure of the Karonga Transit Shelter has proven problematic. Although now officially closed, it is still used by immigration officials to allow asylum seekers shelter for a day or two until they can be transported to the Dzaleka Refugee Camp in Dowa, just outside of Lilongwe. Recent press reports indicated that a fight had broken out at

the shelter between groups of Somalis and Ethiopians over water, underscoring that previous security problems at the shelter still exist. Once arriving in Dzaleka, asylum seekers are put in a large, sheet-metal building while their refugee applications are reviewed. Recently, few from the Horn of Africa have stayed to hear the answer. The Department of Poverty and Disaster Management Affairs (DPDMA), which oversees refugee issues, stated that since June 2007, 1,591 people from Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia had filed a claim of asylum and been sent to the Dzaleka refugee camp, but only 478 remained in the camp as of October 10. Of the 478, 413 had arrived in the previous week. Less than three percent of refugees from Ethiopia and Somalia are women and children, compared to over 75% of refugees from other countries.

**¶4. (SBU)** According to camp officials and United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) staff, the Ethiopians and Somalis use a well-established network of transporters to get through Malawi. Fees range from USD 120-200 to get from Dzaleka to the Mozambican border. Most leave in the middle of the night, often hitching rides in small groups in the cabs or backs of fuel and supply trucks that come near the camp. Others walk into the local villages where they are met by the transporters. All take the camp-provided bedding and provisions with them, forcing camp administrators to issue only minimal supplies until refugee applications are approved. In response to the continued migration, the GOM is moving supervision of refugee issues from the Office of the President and Cabinet to the Ministry of Home Affairs and Internal Security where immigration, police, and prisons are housed.

#### Problems Delay Relocation

LILONGWE 00000803 002 OF 002

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**¶5. (U)** The relocation of the over 3000 Luwani camp refugees to Dzaleka was supposed to be completed by the end of August. A disagreement with locals over land and a shortage of building materials for new shelters have delayed the move completion until the end of November. On October 10, Emboff visited the Dzaleka refugee camp to view the progress of the relocation. According to DPDMA, 760 refugees still remained in Luwani awaiting relocation. Among those who had been relocated to Dzaleka, many still lacked roofs for their shelters. UNHCR staff commented that roofing materials would be delivered the following week, but many refugees expressed concern to Emboff about not having a roof when the rainy season starts in November. The Dzaleka camp covers 201 hectares and UNHCR estimates it can hold a maximum of 9300 people. Once all refugees are relocated it will have a population approaching 8800 people and continues to get a steady stream of new refugees from the Congo.

#### Anti-refugee Sentiment Building

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**¶6. (U)** Dzaleka was opened in 1994 at the location of a former prison. It has land for cultivation, housing, a school, and a medical clinic. In most regards, the conditions of the established part of the camp meet or exceed those of the local villages surrounding the camp. The majority of medical clinic patients are local Malawians and not refugees. Locals believe the clinic has a more reliable stock of medication. The school has over 1,700 students, but with 16 refugee teachers augmenting a local staff of 20 teachers, the school's student-to-teacher ratio is favorable compared to those in neighboring village schools. Over 240 Malawian students have received special permission to attend the Dzaleka camp school instead of local schools due to the perception that it is better and has more resources.

**¶7. (SBU)** In addition to using camp schools and medical facilities, locals continue to try to encroach on camp

property. Local authorities have intervened and forced Malawians to stop cultivating on refugee camp land as more refugees are relocated to Dzaleka. Locals believe it is unfair that refugees are able to cultivate cash crops since they are given food rations each day, while they must plant staples such as maize. While UNHCR continues to encourage the GOM to ease employment and legal restrictions on refugees, the public is asking for more protection from refugee economic competition. Although only 1,389 official refugees live outside the camp in urban areas, Malawians continue to complain that long-time refugees who have settled in the cities are taking jobs and putting locals out of business. Police have responded with round-ups that take refugees who live illegally in cities back to the camp.

¶8. (SBU) Comment: The Luwani camp closure has failed as a method to stop migration from the Horn of Africa through Malawi. The move of refugees to the same ministry as police and immigration is another attempt to try and combat the flow of Somalis and Ethiopians. As stopping what the GOM views as illegal immigration rises in importance, policy shifts may lead to delays in the processing and settlement of legitimate refugees. The lack of a second camp is already stressing the Dzaleka's land and resources, and the camp is unlikely to be able to bear a steady stream of new refugees. There have been only 14 voluntary repatriations in 2007 and the GOM is anxious to restart tripartite talks with the government of Rwanda to discuss the repatriation of over 4000 refugees (septel). With stable neighbors on all borders and new refugees coming from farther away, the GOM will likely take a hard look at its existing refugee laws, as well as those of its neighbors, to see if Malawi can make itself a less appealing refugee destination.

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